

Conserving signature landscapes and vital habitat together with the landowners and communities of the Columbia River region

Germany Creek conservation area expands

By Dan Roix

In 2005, Columbia Land Trust conserved 155 acres on Germany Creek in Cowlitz County, Washington. The acquisition included the lower mile of the creek. Since then, Columbia Land Trust has been actively restoring the lower portion of Germany Creek to natural conditions that benefit salmon species and other wildlife.

historical numbers. The once-productive salmon spawning and rearing habitat has been degraded by over a hundred years of resource extraction and development.

One of the most exciting aspects of the Germany Creek restoration is how it ties into wider salmon restoration efforts (see "Building a Refuge System", page 7). In order to research the effectiveness of salmon restoration efforts, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has been intensively monitoring Germany, Mill, and Abernathy creeks. This ongoing data collection will help determine the most effective mechanisms for salmon restoration and will help provide a model for restoration projects in other

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Photos: Columbia Land Trust staff

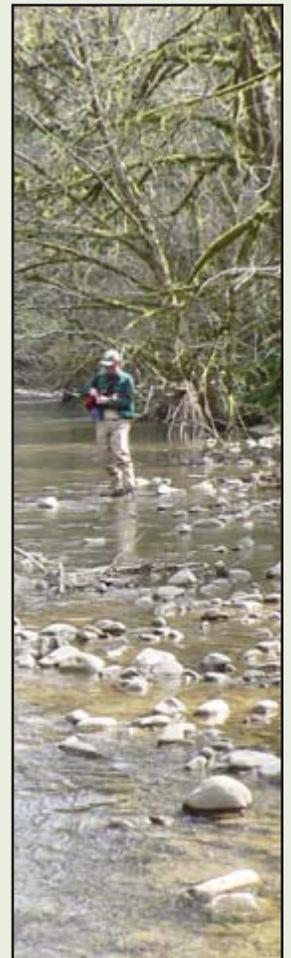


This January, the Land Trust purchased an additional 33 acres immediately upstream of our existing ownership, increasing the conservation area to 188 acres and over a mile-and-a-half of Germany Creek. The acquisition was completed with funding from the Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board. This grant funding is being leveraged against funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and other sources to complete important restoration work along the creek.

Germany Creek is one of a trio of creeks that flow into the Columbia River about 10 miles west of Longview, Washington. Germany is the easternmost creek with Abernathy and Mill Creeks both lying to the west. The Mill, Abernathy, and Germany Creek watersheds historically supported thousands of fish including Chinook, coho, and chum salmon as well as steelhead and cutthroat trout. Today, numbers of naturally spawning salmon and steelhead have plummeted to levels far below

On a recent site visit, I was able to walk over a mile of Germany Creek, taking in the peaceful sounds of flowing water and beautiful scenes of moss and fern-covered trees. It was great to see the healthy, intact riparian area of the newly added acres and heartening to think about the property being permanently conserved. The existing trees will be allowed to grow to maturity and, when they finally fall, some will land in the creek where they will help create complexity and shelter vital to fish and stream life. New trees will thrive in the sunlight, let in by the departure of their elders, and grow to fill their important role in the habitat. These remarkable cycles occur in conserved rivers, streams, and surrounding lands. Where natural processes continue, they support the nature we all cherish.

Dan Roix



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Seven thousand three hundred days

Glenn Lamb's muse

As usual, Alan and Bernice Johnson woke before the sun had crested the horizon. Bernice readied breakfast while Alan walked the familiar muddy trail to put the cows in the lower pasture. The trail wrapped around the edge of the thick ash woodland; a raccoon skittered into the bushes. Every few strides he wiped the cobwebs from his face. Familiar small birds flitted through the woods. Alan walked to the edge of the pasture where Little Matney Creek had been captured in a ditch and routed in straight, perpendicular lines around the perimeter of the pasture.

The Johnson farm is high up in the watershed, the kind of place that likely might have sheltered young salmon in the narrowest shallow little creeks. In those old days, the upper watersheds throughout the Columbia River Basin were the rich nurseries that supported millions and millions of salmon every year.

There are no records to tell us precisely, but perhaps this was the day that, over their hot breakfast, Alan and Bernice made their decision: they would return Little Matney Creek to its original watercourse and re-create the native wetlands that had occupied the lower pasture. They could still keep a few cows up closer to the house and barn, but this lower place would be returned to nature and wildlife.

We may not know the exact day when the Johnsons made their decision, but we do know that it was about 7,300 days ago — 20 years of the sun cresting daily over the eastern horizon — that two separate groups of people formed Columbia Land Trust and Three Rivers Land Conservancy.

Both groups came together to help people just like Alan and Bernice; in fact, the Johnsons were the first family to donate conservation land to Columbia Land Trust. Alan died two years ago; Bernice continues to carry out their dreams. And today there are fish in the Johnson pond and wetlands!

For Three Rivers Land Conservancy, Don and René Pizzo — both firefighters and outstanding civil servants — were early land donors that inspire even today. They bought land on Abernathy Creek near Oregon City, in part because of the great old trees and amazing bird life. The Pizzos then donated a conservation easement on their land, wanting the experience to be available for future generations.

Columbia Land Trust and Three Rivers Land Conservancy had big dreams those 7,300 days ago. The challenge of conserving and restoring our lands to support our salmon and eagles, deer and dragonflies, winter wrens and pileated woodpeckers loomed large. What could we expect to accomplish? How would we do it?

It took us three full years, as volunteers, just to conserve the Johnson property. Our dreams were not coming true quickly enough. Three Rivers Land Conservancy pursued their conservation dreams at a similar, protracted pace.

Ten years ago, both Three Rivers Land Conservancy and Columbia Land Trust hired our first staff. Since that time, in those last 3,650 days, our combined groups have worked with more than 150 landowners to conserve nearly 11,000 acres of land. As you'll read about in Ian Sinks and Eric Allen's article on page 7, we have now knit together the broad framework for a regionally significant fish conservation network — similar in design and function to our nation's wildlife refuge system.

Certainly, we have a long way to go before our salmon populations are stable. And along with the salmon, we need to maintain the diversity of birds, bugs, plants, and animals that help sustain our natural infrastructure.



Muse: page 7

Tales from the field: the serpent snag

By Lindsay Cornelius

There is a phenomenon among nature lovers that I'm not sure has a name, but that I'm sure deserves one. It's responsible for accounts of sharks in the sky, monsters in the woods, and the excited pitter-patter of your heart in the dark shadows of the night. It's when serendipity offers a brief glimpse of our natural world at just the right moment to make that which you are viewing the likeness of something else — a shark-shaped cloud or a sasquatch-shaped shadow. And so it is last week that I added one of my own: a serpent-shaped snag.

Volunteer site steward, Sonya Bastendorff, and I were hiking the western slopes of the Klickitat River when we spied an interesting form on the wooded bench just below us. It was an old pine snag, nearly fallen over and leaning into the hillside, shaped most remarkably like a serpent's head. We shared a moment of giddiness at our observation and then continued on our way, making note of other snags providing invaluable habitat services to the plant and animal communities of the Klickitat.

Snags, or standing dead trees, are valuable components of forest habitat. They contribute to soil composition and forest structure. They also provide food and shelter for birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and invertebrates as well as substrate for lichens, mosses,

Photo: Lindsay Cornelius



and fungi. The number and size of snags in a forest stand are important predictors of future fire behavior, and individual snags are also clues to the past: how did the trees die, when did they die, how old were they, did they survive fires during their lifetimes, did they survive periods of drought or disease?

Snags, technically dead and decaying, teem with life. Peer

into the holes bored by insects and birds, listen to the drumming of a woodpecker, watch an eagle perch, observe a mushroom blossoming from decay. Snags play critical roles in the web of forest life and, as our serpent snag can bear witness, in the fertile landscapes of the human imagination. ■

TOURS & EVENTS



Mill Creek Ridge Hike & Wildflowers

Friday, May 7, 2010
8:00 am – 6:00 pm

Spring in the Gorge always promises spectacular floral displays. Make a day of it and join us for this tour and hike at one of the greatest times of the year. If that's not enough, how about a stop at a local winery on our return?

All tours are free of charge.
Gifts to support our work are always appreciated.

Space is limited — reserve your spot today!

**Call Tammy
(360) 213-1201 or (503) 224-3601**

SAVE THE DATE

June 5 — Great Blue Heron Tour

More details available soon!



Photo: Rollin Bannock

Mill Creek Natural Area

I remember the barking coyote
Sneaking up, watching her/listening to that voice-song
Close-up.

A meadowlark's nest discovery
Hidden beneath the embrace of arrowleaf balsamroot's
Stems and leaves
Roofed in thatch of grasses.

Meadowlarks are common here
Our state bird
As are Lewis's Woodpeckers
and western bluebirds.

We put up a bluebird nest box here
Three years ago
Since then, over thirty bluebirds have hatched
From blue sky eggs
And flown off to their destinies.

Here dwells, too, our own little temporary herds
Of black-tailed deer
Unrestrained by border fences
Which they leap o'er, or slip under
With grace, and room to spare.

The bucks' antlers, covered in velvet
The fawns with their spotted coats
The does alert and keeping their distance.

On occasion, a golden eagle
Soars along this ridgeline
And rarer yet
Drops a wing feather gift
Which lies lightly on the ground.

Red-tailed hawks nest here
High up
Near the tops of ponderosa pines
And the wind sings a flying song
Through the tree branches and green needle clusters
To their newly hatched, and soon to fly, fledglings.

The sun grows a green carpet of grasses, every spring
And Oregon oaks, and fields of perennial flowers, bud
and bloom
Finding space and a stronghold yet in these open spaces.
And sounds reach here from a distance
Transformed to musical notes by the breezes
And all around is space, circling this island land of solitudes.

Bruce Lumper

Mill Creek

By Bruce Lumper

The pastoral Mill Creek Valley is home to cherry orchards, hay and cattle farms, vineyards, and old and new settlers, with the creek still hosting a small run of native winter steelhead. The high north ridge rises from the valley floor with its south face seasonally blanketed in an assortment of flowering plants and native grasses, including old-growth communities of balsamroot and lupine, while the north side is shrouded in pine-oak woodlands. Myriad wildlife species live here including pronghorn antelope, mule deer, coyotes, meadowlarks, bluebirds, Lewis's woodpecker, and neotropical migratory birds. Zoned largely as 10-acre residential lots, the now undeveloped ridge is at risk of being broken up by new fences, houses, and roads, which would fragment wildlife habitat and the extensive carpeting of native wildflowers.

My wife, Marolyn Wilks, and I began an effort to protect a 200-acre core area along a mile-and-a-half of the ridgeline in 2005. To date, we have purchased — and are holding for conservation — around 100 acres of the core project area. Columbia Land Trust has been working with us during this time to develop a project brochure, create a video (see www.columbialandtrust.org), and to set up a fund at the Land Trust so that contributions to the project are tax deductible. Columbia Land Trust has also marshaled the efforts of their many volunteers to conduct plant and bird surveys, photo shoots, and even a fence removal work party on the ridgeline.

Last spring, a couple from Salem — out on a volunteer-led spring wildflower tour of the ridge — was so inspired by the area and this private conservation effort, that they purchased the remaining 100 acres of the core area, and are now holding it for conservation as well.

The next stage of this project is to conserve an additional 800 acres of private property along the ridgeline either through outright purchase or conservation easements. This would bring the total project acreage to 1,000 acres, with four miles of ridgeline being protected from development.

Columbia Land Trust has selected the Mill Creek Natural Area as one of its top priority projects for support in 2010. Come see this worthy project for yourself! The next tour of the Mill Creek Natural Area will be scheduled for the peak of the spring wildflower season on May 7, 2010. See tours on page 3. ■



Bruce checks a bluebird nest box

Photo courtesy of Bruce Lumper

U.S. Fish & Wildlife awards \$1 million grant

By Nadia Gardner

Coastal areas comprise less than 10 percent of the nation's land area, yet support the majority of wildlife species, including 75 percent of migratory birds, nearly 80 percent of fish and shellfish, and almost half of all threatened and endangered species. Coastal wetlands are particularly important to wildlife and Columbia Land Trust is actively working to conserve these sensitive areas in Oregon and Washington. A newly awarded million dollar grant is helping us to meet our coastal conservation goals.

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced in January the award of \$19.2 million to support 25 conservation projects benefiting fish and wildlife on more than 6,100 acres of coastal habitat in 11 states through the 2010 National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS). Funding is provided through the Sport Fish Restoration Act — revenue generated from an excise tax on fishing equipment and motorboat and small engine fuels.

"There are few actions we can take that are more important to the health of our environment, our wildlife, and ultimately our coastal communities and their economies, than conserving and restoring these vital wetlands," Salazar said. "These grants will enable us to continue to work in partnership with states, conservation organizations, and other partners to acquire, protect, and restore these vital areas and the fish and wildlife that depend on them."

The Land Trust, in partnership with Washington's Department of Ecology, was awarded one million dollars to conserve 125 acres of highly threatened, declining coastal wetlands in the Island & Loomis Lakes Conservation Area on the Long Beach Peninsula in Southwest Washington. The land is on the shorelines of Island and Loomis Lakes, north of Long Beach. The new acquisitions will be added to the adjacent 890 acres of land already conserved by the Land Trust (including Island Lake Forest), Washington State Parks & Recreation, and Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

The Island & Loomis Lakes Conservation Area is part of the extensive interdunal freshwater habitat complex that runs the length of the Long Beach Peninsula. It includes a diversity of habitats, including mature Sitka spruce-

Douglas Fir forest, Sitka spruce swamp, sphagnum bog, and a series of freshwater lakes. The area hosts myriad wildlife, including numerous bird species such as trumpeter swan, osprey, peregrine falcon, and many shorebirds and waterfowl. River otter, elk, and black bear are also found here.



Western sandpiper
(*Calidris mauri*)

Photo: Eric Bjorkman

Including the 2010 grants, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has awarded nearly \$240 million to coastal states and territories since the program began in 1992. When the 2010 projects are complete, over 260,000 acres of habitat will have been protected, restored, or enhanced.

Columbia Land Trust staff extends a big "thank you!" to those who helped support the proposal, including Jeanne Koenings (WA Dept. of Ecology), Nell Fuller (USFWS), Ginger Phalen (USFWS), Bob Altman (American Bird

Conservancy), and, of course, you for your sustaining support as members. An extra-special thank you goes out to several specific Columbia Land Trust members. In order to prevent the development of one of the properties while we were raising the funds necessary to buy it, these generous people provided us with interest-free loans totaling \$450,000 to purchase the land immediately. ■

"There are few actions we can take that are more important to the health of our environment, our wildlife, and ultimately our coastal communities and their economies, than conserving and restoring these vital wetlands"

Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior

Welcome to the 2010 AmeriCorps team

By Ian Sinks

The Land Trust is thrilled to welcome the 2010 Northwest Service Academy/AmeriCorps team members to join in the work of the stewardship program. This four-person team of conservation specialists will build off of the experience and success of the 2009 team by continuing to develop and implement restoration projects, recruit and support our dedicated cadre of volunteers, and monitor the results of our work. The 2009 team exceeded our expectations in terms of energy, dedication, and ability to accomplish significant work in just 11 months. We look forward to the accomplishments, and adventures, of the 2010 team.

The team will be taking on site work together throughout the year, but each member has their area of expertise and focus:

Kelly Kay, Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator. Kelly will be continuing the work of the volunteer program including recruiting, training, and supporting site stewards, and organizing volunteer days for individuals as well as for organized groups. Kelly will also be focusing on diversity in the volunteer program by reaching out to new communities throughout our region.

Kimberly Biafora, Monitoring Specialist. Kim will be taking on and supporting a variety of stewardship monitoring responsibilities ranging from annual monitoring of properties to collecting data on vegetation, water quality, sediment, and fish use.

Reb Ratliff, Restoration Projects Planner. Reb comes to the Land Trust from a sister land trust in Michigan where he helped monitor and maintain conservation properties. Reb will be working to develop and implement restoration work on conservation properties.

Isaac Sandlin, Team Leader. Fresh from North Carolina by way of a Youth Conservation Corps assignment in the mountains of Montana, Isaac will lead the team throughout. ■



Photo: Andrea Berkeley

2010 AmeriCorps team

From left: Reb Ratliff, Kimberly Biafora, Kelly Kay, Isaac Sandlin

Volunteer opportunities

■ **Planting and Weed Control at Germany Creek** — Saturday, March 27 near Longview, WA, 10 AM to 3 PM.

Come out to Germany Creek to experience vital Chum salmon spawning grounds and habitat for threatened species like the Columbian white-tailed deer and the bald eagle. Together, we will be working on reforesting salmon habitat and removing pesky invasive species like English ivy.

■ **Weed Control at Little White Salmon Biodiversity Reserve** — Friday, April 9 near White Salmon, WA, 10 AM to 3 PM.

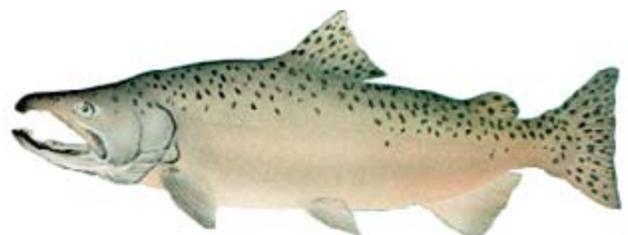
Little White Salmon Biodiversity Reserve is just one of the many gems in the scenic Columbia River Gorge. Thanks to help from our volunteers, we have made great headway on the invasive Scots Broom and thistle growing on the property. Come lend a hand, or two, in our ongoing effort to control the spread of these species.

Interested? RSVP to volunteer@columbialandtrust.org or call (360) 213-1215.

Germany Creek: continued from page 1

watersheds. Columbia Land Trust is pleased to play a part in these region-wide efforts to improve habitat for endangered and threatened fish species.

In addition to benefiting salmon, the new acquisition along Germany Creek will help a variety of wildlife from elk to bald eagles. The Land Trust will work with professionals and volunteers to remove invasive species and replant native species, enhancing the riparian areas on the property and restoring the upland slopes to a more natural condition. ■



Chinook salmon

Building a refuge system

By Ian Sinks and Eric Allen

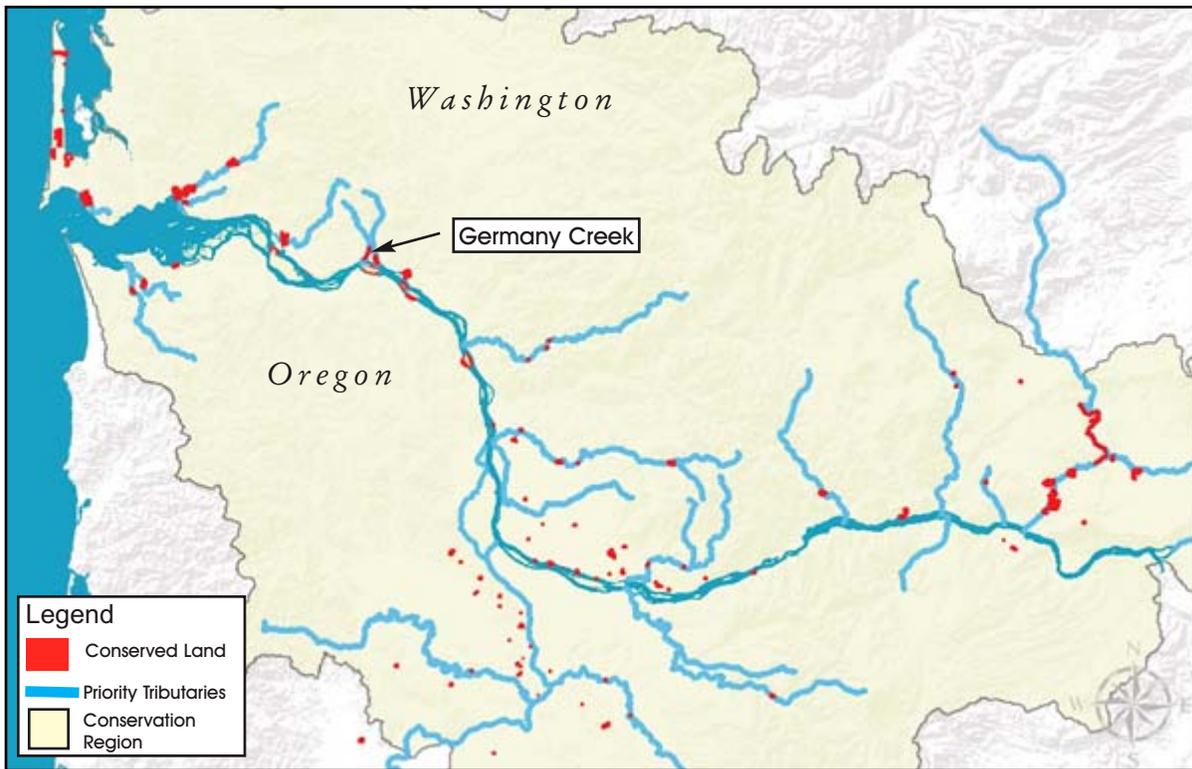
The expansion of the Germany Creek conservation area is the latest link in the growing chain of Land Trust projects that are critical to Pacific salmon. As the map below shows, we have conserved land and restored habitat along the main stem of the Columbia River and also on over 20 of its high-priority tributaries.

Making a meaningful impact on the health of the salmon requires considering all of the ecological elements that salmon need to migrate, spawn, rear, travel to the ocean, and return successfully. Migration from fresh to saltwater and back again is one of nature's spectacles and requires the complexity and the continuum of different habitats that supports each phase of the salmon lifecycle.

The conservation work of Columbia Land Trust is one piece of the salmon recovery puzzle. Working at the Columbia River scale also requires working in partnerships

with many different agencies (federal, state, and tribal), other nonprofits, and private landowners. Willing landowners, supportive communities, funding and technical support, and leveraging resources makes this work possible. The Land Trust conservation properties are providing critical links between these partners, and, combined with the Land Trust's ability to implement habitat restoration, are providing meaningful ecological benefits.

Healthy ecosystems also provide many other benefits: jobs, recreation, tourism, clean air and water, flood attenuation, carbon sequestration. Finding common ground is part of the mission of the Land Trust's conservation work: working where conservation and community goals overlap is how we will continue to find success. There is so much more that needs to be done if we are once again to realize the healthy watersheds and abundant salmon populations of our grandparents. ■



Muse: continued from page 2

But know this: the only way that we've ever succeeded, and the only way that we will continue to succeed, is by relying on people like Alan and Bernice Johnson and Don and René Pizzo, day after day. It takes people like you, members of Three Rivers Land Conservancy or Columbia Land Trust, to be with us every day, year in and year out. As you see the sun crest the eastern horizon know that we, and people like the Johnsons and the Pizzos, are taking action to conserve our great places. ■

Leave a legacy of conservation.

Columbia Land Trust has pledged to care forever for land that you as a member are helping conserve today. By including Columbia Land Trust in your estate planning, you can continue to make a difference for generations to come.

**For more information
call Development Director Eric Allen
(360) 213-1203 or (503) 224-3601**



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2010

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Vancouver, Washington

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